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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & COMPANY,
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POEMS

UNGUARDED GATES

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1895

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PRELUDE

PRELUDE

In youth, beside the lonely sea,
Voices and visions came to me.

Titania and her furtive broods
Were my familiars in the woods.

From every flower that broke in flame,
Some half-articulate whisper came.

In every wind I felt the stir
Of some celestial messenger.

Later, amid the city's din
And toil and wealth and want and sin,

They followed me from street to street,
The dreams that made my boyhood sweet.

As in the silence-haunted glen,
So, mid the crowded ways of men,

Strange lights my errant fancy led,
Strange watchers watched beside my bed.

Ill fortune had no shafts for me
In this aerial company.

Now one by one the visions fly,
And one by one the voices die.

More distantly the accents ring,

More frequent the receding wing.

Full dark shall be the days in store,

When voice and vision come no more!

UNGUARDED GATES

UNGUARDED GATES

WIDE open and unguarded stand our gates,
Named of the four winds, North, South, East, and
West;
Portals that lead to an enchanted land
Of cities, forests, fields of living gold,
Vast prairies, lordly summits touched with snow,
Majestic rivers sweeping proudly past
The Arab's date-palm and the Norseman's
pine —
A realm wherein are fruits of every zone,
Airs of all climes, for lo! throughout the year
The red rose blossoms somewhere — a rich land,

A later Eden planted in the wilds,
With not an inch of earth within its bound
But if a slave's foot press it sets him free.
Here, it is written, Toil shall have its wage,
And Honor honor, and the humblest man
Stand level with the highest in the law.
Of such a land have men in dungeons dreamed,
And with the vision brightening in their eyes
Gone smiling to the fagot and the sword.

Wide open and unguarded stand our gates,
And through them presses a wild motley throng —
Men from the Volga and the Tartar steppes,
Featureless figures of the Hoang-Ho,
Malayan, Scythian, Teuton, Kelt, and Slav,
Flying the Old World's poverty and scorn;
These bringing with them unknown gods and rites,

Those, tiger passions, here to stretch their claws.
In street and alley what strange tongues are loud,
Accents of menace alien to our air,
Voices that once the Tower of Babel knew!
O Liberty, white Goddess! is it well
To leave the gates unguarded? On thy breast
Fold Sorrow's children, soothe the hurts of fate,
Lift the down-trodden, but with hand of steel
Stay those who to thy sacred portals come
To waste the gifts of freedom. Have a care
Lest from thy brow the clustered stars be torn
And trampled in the dust. For so of old
The thronging Goth and Vandal trampled Rome,
And where the temples of the Cæsars stood
The lean wolf unmolested made her lair.

ELMWOOD

IN MEMORY OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

HERE, in the twilight, at the well-known gate
I linger, with no heart to enter more.
Among the elm-tops the autumnal air
Murmurs, and spectral in the fading light
A solitary heron wings its way
Southward — save this no sound or touch of life.
Dark is that window where the scholar's lamp
Was used to catch a pallor from the dawn.

Yet I must needs a little linger here.
Each shrub and tree is eloquent of him,

For tongueless things and silence have their speech.

This is the path familiar to his foot
From infancy to manhood and old age;
For in a chamber of that ancient house
His eyes first opened on the mystery
Of life, and all the splendor of the world.
Here, as a child, in loving, curious way,
He watched the bluebird's coming; learned the date
Of hyacinth and goldenrod, and made
Friends of those little redmen of the elms,
And slyly added to their winter store
Of hazel-nuts: no harmless thing that breathed,
Footed or winged, but knew him for a friend.
The gilded butterfly was not afraid
To trust its gold to that so gentle hand,

The bluebird fled not from the pendent spray.
Ah, happy childhood, ringed with fortunate stars!
What dreams were his in this enchanted sphere,
What intuitions of high destiny!
The honey-bees of Hybla touched his lips
In that old New-World garden, unawares.

So in her arms did Mother Nature fold
Her poet, whispering what of wild and sweet
Into his ear — the state-affairs of birds,
The lore of dawn and sunset, what the wind
Said in the tree-tops — fine, unfathomed things
Henceforth to turn to music in his brain:
A various music, now like notes of flutes,
And now like blasts of trumpets blown in wars.
Later he paced this leafy academe
A student, drinking from Greek chalices

The ripened vintage of the antique world.
And here to him came love, and love's dear loss;
Here honors came, the deep applause of men
Touched to the heart by some swift-wingëd word
That from his own full heart took eager flight —
Some strain of piercing sweetness or rebuke,
For underneath his gentle nature flamed
A noble scorn for all ignoble deed,
Himself a bondman till all men were free.

Thus passed his manhood; then to other lands
He strayed, a stainless figure among courts
Beside the Manzanares and the Thames.
Whence, after too long exile, he returned
With fresher laurel, but sedater step
And eye more serious, fain to breathe the air

Where through the Cambridge marshes the blue
Charles
Uncoils its length and stretches to the sea :
Stream dear to him, at every curve a shrine
For pilgrim Memory. Again he watched
His loved syringa whitening by the door,
And knew the catbird's welcome ; in his walks
Smiled on his tawny kinsmen of the elms
Stealing his nuts ; and in the ruined year
Sat at his widowed hearthside with bent brows
Leonine, frosty with the breath of time,
And listened to the crooning of the wind
In the wide Elmwood chimneys, as of old.
And then — and then . . .

The after-glow has faded from the elms,
And in the denser darkness of the boughs

From time to time the firefly's tiny lamp
Sparkles. How often in still summer dusks
He paused to note that transient phantom spark
Flash on the air — a light that outlasts him !

The night grows chill, as if it felt a breath
Blown from that frozen city where he lies.
All things turn strange. The leaf that rustles here
Has more than autumn's mournfulness. The place
Is heavy with his absence. Like fixed eyes
Whence the dear light of sense and thought has fled
The vacant windows stare across the lawn.
The wise sweet spirit that informed it all
Is otherwhere. The house itself is dead.

O autumn wind among the sombre pines,
Breathe you his dirge, but be it sweet and low,
With deep refrains and murmurs of the sea,
Like to his verse — the art is yours alone.
His once — you taught him. Now no voice but yours!
Tender and low, O wind among the pines.
I would, were mine a lyre of richer strings,
In soft Sicilian accents wrap his name.

A SHADOW OF THE NIGHT

CLOSE on the edge of a midsummer dawn
In troubled dreams I went from land to land,
Each seven-colored like the rainbow's arc,
Regions where never fancy's foot had trod
Till then; yet all the strangeness seemed not strange,
At which I wondered, reasoning in my dream
With two-fold sense, well knowing that I slept.
At last I came to this our cloud-hung earth,
And somewhere by the seashore was a grave,
A woman's grave, new-made, and heaped with flowers;

And near it stood an ancient holy man
That fain would comfort me, who sorrowed not
For this unknown dead woman at my feet.
But I, because his sacred office held
My reverence, listened ; and 't was thus he spake :
" When next thou comest thou shalt find her still
In all the rare perfection that she was.
Thou shalt have gentle greeting of thy love !
Her eyelids will have turned to violets,
Her bosom to white lilies, and her breath
To roses. What is lovely never dies,
But passes into other loveliness,
Star-dust, or sea-foam, flower, or wingëd air.
If this befalls our poor unworthy flesh,
Think thee what destiny awaits the soul !
What glorious vesture it shall wear at last ! "
While yet he spoke, seashore and grave and
priest

Vanished, and faintly from a neighboring spire
Fell five slow solemn strokes upon my ear.
Then I awoke with a keen pain at heart,
A sense of swift unutterable loss,
And through the darkness reached my hand to touch
Her cheek, soft-pillowed on one restful palm —
To be quite sure!

SEA LONGINGS

THE first world-sound that fell upon my ear
Was that of the great winds along the coast
Crushing the deep-sea beryl on the rocks —
The distant breakers' sullen cannonade.
Against the spires and gables of the town
The white fog drifted, catching here and there
At over-leaning cornice or peaked roof,
And hung — weird gonfalons. The garden walks
Were choked with leaves, and on their ragged
biers
Lay dead the sweets of summer — damask rose,
Clove-pink, old-fashioned, loved New England
flowers.

Only keen salt sea-odors filled the air.

Sea-sounds, sea-odors — these were all my world.

Hence is it that life languishes with me

Inland ; the valleys stifle me with gloom

And pent-up prospect ; in their narrow bound

Imagination flutters futile wings.

Vainly I seek the sloping pearl-white sand

And the mirage's phantom citadels

Miraculous, a moment seen, then gone.

Among the mountains I am ill at ease,

Missing the stretched horizon's level line

And the illimitable restless blue.

The crag-torn sky is not the sky I love,

But one unbroken sapphire spanning all ;

And nobler than the branches of a pine

Aslant upon a precipice's edge

Are the strained spars of some great battle-ship

Plowing across the sunset. No bird's lilt
So takes me as the whistling of the gale
Among the shrouds. My cradle-song was this,
Strange inarticulate sorrows of the sea,
Blithe rhythms upgathered from the Sirens' caves.
Perchance of earthly voices the last voice
That shall an instant my freed spirit stay
On this world's verge, will be some message blown
Over the dim salt lands that fringe the coast
At dusk, or when the trancëd midnight droops
With weight of stars, or haply just as dawn,
Illumining the sullen purple wave,
Turns the gray pools and willow-stems to gold.

THE LAMENT OF EL MOULOK

WITHIN the sacred precincts of the mosque,
Even on the very steps of St. Sophia,
He lifted up his voice and spoke these words,
El Moulok, who sang naught but love-songs once,
And now was crazed because his son was dead:

O ye who leave
Your slippers at the portal, as is meet,
Give heed an instant ere ye bow in prayer.

Ages ago,
Allah, grown weary of His myriad worlds,
Would one star more to hang against the blue.

Then of men's bones,

Millions on millions, did He build the earth.

Of women's tears,

Down falling through the night, He made the sea.

Of sighs and sobs

He made the winds that surge about the globe.

Where'er ye tread,

Ye tread on dust that once was living man.

The mist and rain

Are tears that first from human eyelids fell.

The unseen winds

Breathe endless lamentation for the dead.

Not so the ancient tablets told the tale,
Not so the Koran! This was blasphemy,
And they that heard El Moulok dragged him hence,
Even from the very steps of St. Sophia,
And loaded him with triple chains of steel,
And cast him in a dungeon.

None the less
Do women's tears fall ceaseless day and night,
And none the less do mortals faint and die
And turn to dust; and every wind that blows
About the globe seems heavy with the grief
Of those who sorrow, or have sorrowed, here.
Yet none the less is Allah the Most High,
The Clement, the Compassionate. He sees
Where we are blind, and hallowed be His Name!

NECROMANCY

THROUGH a chance fissure of the churchyard
wall
A creeping vine puts forth a single spray,
At whose slim end a starry blossom droops
Full to the soft vermilion of a rose
That reaches up on tiptoe for the kiss.
Not them the wren disturbs, nor the loud bee
That buzzes homeward with his load of sweets:
And thus they linger, flowery lip to lip,
Heedless of all, in rapturous mute embrace.
Some necromancy here! These two, I think,
Were once unhappy lovers upon earth.

WHITE EDITH

ABOVE an ancient book, with a knight's crest
In tarnished gold on either cover stamped,
She leaned, and read — a chronicle it was
In which the sound of hautboys stirred the pulse,
And masques and gilded pageants fed the eye.
Though here and there the vellum page was stained
Sanguine with battle, chiefly it was love
The stylus held — some wan-cheeked scribe, perchance,
That in a mouldy tower by candle-light
Forgot his hunger in his madrigals.
Outside was winter: in its winding-sheet

The frozen Year lay. Silent was the room,
Save when the wind against the casement pressed
Or a page rustled, turned impatiently,
Or when along the still damp apple-wood
A little flame ran that chirped like a bird —
Some wren's ghost haunting the familiar bough.

With parted lips, in which less color lived
Than paints the pale wild-rose, she leaned and read.
From time to time her fingers unawares
Closed on the palm ; and oft upon her cheek
The pallor died, and left such transient glow
As might from some rich chapel window fall
On a girl's cheek at prayer. So moved her soul,
From this dull age unshackled and divorced,
In far moon-haunted gardens of romance.

But once the wind that swept the palsied oaks,
As if new-pierced with sorrow, came and moaned
Close by the casement; then she raised her eyes,
The light of dreams still fringing them, and spoke:
"Tell me, good cousin, does this book say true?
Is it so fine a thing to be a queen?"

As if a spell of incantation dwelt
In those soft syllables, before me stood,
Colored like life, the phantasm of a maid
Who, in the savage childhood of this world,
Was crowned by error, or through dark intent
Made queen, and for the durance of one day
The royal diadem and ermine wore.
In strange sort wore — for this queen fed the starved,
The naked clothed, threw open dungeon doors;

Could to no story list of suffering
But the full tear was lovely on her lash;
Taught Grief to smile, and wan Despair to hope;
Upon her stainless bosom pillowed Sin
Repentant at her feet — like Him of old;
Made even the kerns and wild-men of the fells,
That sniffing pillage clamored at the gate,
Gentler than doves by some unknown white art,
And saying to herself, "So, I am Queen!"
With lip all tremulous, held out her hand
To the crowd's kiss. What joy to ease the hurt
Of bruisëd hearts! As in a trance she walked
That live-long day. Then night came, and the stars,
And blissful sleep. But ere the birds were called
By bluebell chimes (unheard of mortal ear)
To matins in their branch-hung priories —

Ere yet the dawn its gleaming edge lay bare
Like to the burnished axe's subtle edge,
She, from her sleep's caresses roughly torn,
The meek eyes blinking in the torches' glare,
Upon a scaffold for her glory paid
Her cheeks' two roses. For it so befell
That from the Northland there was come a prince,
With a great clash of shields and trailing spears
Through the black portals of the breathless night,
To claim the sceptre. He no less would take
Than those same roses for his usury.
What less, in faith! The throne was rightly his
Of that sea-girdled isle; so to the block
Needs go the ringlets and the white swan-throat.
A touch of steel, a sudden darkness, then
Blue Heaven and all the hymning angel-choir!
No tears for her — keep tears for those who live

To mate with sin and shame, and have remorse
At last to light them to unhallowed earth.
Hers no such low-hung fortunes. Thus to stand
Supreme one instant at that dizzy height,
With no hoarse raven croaking in her ear
The certain doom, and then to have life's rose
Struck swiftly from the cheek, and so escape
Love's death, black treason, friend's ingratitude,
The pang of separation, chill of age,
The grief that in an empty cradle lies,
And all the unspoke sorrow women know —
That was, in truth, to have a happy reign!
Has thine been happier, Sovereign of the Sea,
In that long-mateless pilgrimage to death?
Or thine, whose beauty like a star illumed
Awhile the dark and angry sky of France,
Thy kingdom shrunken to two exiled graves?

Sweet old-world maid, a gentler fate was yours!
Would he had wed your story to his verse
Who from the misty land of legend brought
Helen of Troy to gladden English eyes.
There 's many a queen that lived her grandeur out,
Gray-haired and broken, might have envied you,
Your Majesty, that reigned a single day!

All this, as 't were between two beats of heart,
Flashed through my mind, so lightning-like is thought.
With lifted eyes expectant, there she sat
Whose words had sent my fancy over-sea,
Her lip still trembling with its own soft speech,
As for a moment trembles the curved spray
Whence some winged melody has taken flight.
How every circumstance of time and place

Upon the glass of memory lives again! —
The bleak New England road; the level boughs
Like bars of iron across the setting sun;
The gray ribbed clouds piled up against the West;
The windows splashed with frost; the fire-lit room,
And in the antique chair that slight girl-shape,
The auburn braid about the saintly brows
Making a nimbus, and she white as snow!

"Dear Heart," I said, "the humblest place is best
For gentle souls — the throne's foot, not the throne.
The storms that smite the dizzy solitudes
Where monarchs sit — most lonely folk are they! —

Oft leave the vale unscathed; there dwells content,
If so content have habitation here.
Never have I in annals read or rhyme
Of queen save one that found not at the end
The cup too bitter; never queen save one,
And she — her empire lasted but a day!
Yet that brief breath of time did she so fill
With mercy, love, and holy charity
As more rich made it than long-drawn-out years
Of such weed-life as drinks the lavish sun
And rots unflower'd." "Straight tell me of that queen!"
Cried Edith; "Brunhild, in my legend here,
Is lovely — was that other still more fair?
And had she not a Siegfried at the court
To steal her talisman? — that Siegfried did

At Günther's bidding. Was your queen not loved?
Tell me it all!" With chin upon her palm
Resting, she listened, and within her eyes
The sapphire deepened as I told the tale
Of the girl-empress in the dawn of Time —
A flower that on the vermeil brink of May
Died, with its folded whiteness for a shroud;
A strain of music that, ere it was mixed
With baser voices, floated up to heaven.

Without was silence, for the wind was spent
That all the day had pleaded at the door.
Against the crimson sunset elm and oak
Stood black and motionless; among the boughs
The sad wind slumbered. Silence filled the room,

Save when from out the crumbled apple branch
Came the wren's twitter, faint, and fainter now,
Like a bird's note far heard in twilight woods.
No other sound was. Presently a hand
Stole into mine, and rested there, inert,
Like some new-gathered snowy hyacinth,
So white and cold and delicate it was.
I know not what dark shadow crossed my heart,
What vague presentiment, but as I stooped
To lift the slender fingers to my lip,
I saw it through a mist of strangest tears —
The thin white hand invisible Death had
touched!

INTERLUDES

INSOMNIA

SLUMBER, hasten down this way,
And, ere midnight dies,
Silence lay upon my lips,
Darkness on my eyes.

Send me a fantastic dream;
Fashion me afresh;
Into some celestial thing
Change this mortal flesh.

Well I know one may not choose;
One is helpless still

In the purple realm of Sleep:
Use me as you will.

Let me be a frozen pine
In dead glacier lands;
Let me pant, a leopard stretched
On the Libyan sands.

Silver fin or scarlet wing
Grant me, either one;
Sink me deep in emerald glooms,
Lift me to the sun.

Or of me a gargoyle make,
Face of ape or gnome,
Such as frights the tavern-boor
Reeling drunken home.

Work on me your own caprice,

Give me any shape;

Only, Slumber, from myself

Let myself escape!

SEEMING DEFEAT

THE woodland silence, one time stirred
By the soft pathos of some passing bird,
Is not the same it was before.
The spot where once, unseen, a flower
Has held its fragile chalice to the shower,
Is different for evermore.
Unheard, unseen,
A spell has been!

O thou that breathest year by year
Music that falls unheeded on the ear,
Take heart, fate has not baffled thee!
Thou that with tints of earth and skies

Fillest thy canvas for unseeing eyes,

Thou hast not labored futilely.

Unheard, unseen,

A spell has been!

TWO MOODS

I

BETWEEN the budding and the falling leaf
Stretch happy skies ;
With colors and sweet cries
Of mating birds in uplands and in glades
The world is rife.
Then on a sudden all the music dies,
The color fades.
How fugitive and brief
Is mortal life
Between the budding and the falling leaf !

O short-breathed music, dying on the tongue
Ere half the mystic canticle be sung!
O harp of life, so speedily unstrung!
Who, if 't were his to choose, would know again
The bitter sweetness of the lost refrain,
Its rapture, and its pain?

II

Though I be shut in darkness, and become
Insentient dust blown idly here and there,
I count oblivion a scant price to pay
For having once had held against my lip
Life's brimming cup of hydromel and rue —
For having once known woman's holy love
And a child's kiss, and for a little space
Been boon companion to the Day and Night,
Fed on the odors of the summer dawn,

And folded in the beauty of the stars.

Dear Lord, though I be changed to senseless clay,

And serve the potter as he turns his wheel,

I thank Thee for the gracious gift of tears!

A PARABLE

ONE went East, and one went West
Across the wild sea-foam,
And both were on the self-same quest.
Now one there was who cared for naught,
So stayed at home:
Yet of the three 't was only he
Who reached the goal — by him unsought.

"GREAT CAPTAIN, GLORIOUS IN OUR WARS"

GREAT Captain, glorious in our wars —
No meed of praise we hold from him ;
About his brow we wreathe the stars
The coming ages shall not dim.

The cloud-sent man ! Was it not he
That from the hand of adverse fate
Snatched the white flower of victory ?
He spoke no word, but saved the State.

Yet History, as she brooding bends
Above the tablet on her knee,

The impartial stylus half suspends,
And fain would blot the cold decree:

"The iron hand and sleepless care
That stayed disaster scarce availed
To serve him when he came to wear
The civic laurel: there he failed."

Who runs may read; but nothing mars
That nobler record, unforgot.
Great Captain, glorious in our wars —
All else the heart remembers not.

A REFRAIN

HIGH in a tower she sings,
I, passing by beneath,
Pause and listen, and catch
These words of passionate breath —
"*Asphodel, flower of Life; amaranth, flower of Death!*"

Sweet voice, sweet unto tears!
What is this that she saith?
Poignant, mystical — hark!
Again, with passionate breath —
"*Asphodel, flower of Life; amaranth, flower of Death!*"

AT NIJNII-NOVGOROD

" A CRAFTY Persian set this stone;
A dusk Sultana wore it;
And from her slender finger, sir,
A ruthless Arab tore it.

" A ruby, like a drop of blood —
That deep-in tint that lingers
And seems to melt, perchance was caught
From those poor mangled fingers!

" A spendthrift got it from the knave,
And tost it, like a blossom,

That night into a dancing-girl's
Accurst and balmy bosom.

"And so it went. One day a Jew
At Cairo chanced to spy it
Amid a one-eyed peddler's pack,
And did not care to buy it —

"Yet bought it all the same. You see,
The Jew he knew a jewel.
He bought it cheap to sell it dear:
The ways of trade are cruel.

"But I — be Allah's all the praise! —
Such avarice, I scoff it!
If I buy cheap, why, I sell cheap,
Content with modest profit.

"This ring — such chasing! look, milord,
What workmanship! By Heaven,
The price I name you makes the thing
As if the thing were given!

"A stone without a flaw! A queen
Might not disdain to wear it.
Three hundred roubles buys the stone;
No kopeck less, I swear it!"

Thus Hassan, holding up the ring
To me, no eager buyer. —
A hundred roubles was not much
To pay so sweet a liar!

THE WINTER ROBIN

Sursum corda

Now is that sad time of year
When no flower or leaf is here;
When in misty Southern ways
Oriole and jay have flown,
And of all sweet birds, alone
The robin stays.

So give thanks at Christmas-tide:
Hopes of spring-time yet abide!
See, in spite of darksome days,
Wind and rain and bitter chill,
Snow, and sleet-hung branches, still
The robin stays!

THE SAILING OF THE AUTOCRAT

ON BOARD THE S. S. CEPHALONIA, APRIL 26, 1886

I

O WIND and Wave, be kind to him!
So, Wave and Wind, we give thee thanks!
O Fog, that from Newfoundland Banks
Makest the blue bright ocean dim,
Delay him not! And ye who snare
The wayworn shipman with your song,
Go pipe your ditties otherwhere
While this brave vessel plows along!
If still to lure him be your thought,
O phantoms of the watery zone,

Look lively lest yourselves get caught
With music sweeter than your own!

II

Yet, soft sea-spirits, be not mute;
Murmur about the prow, and make
Melodious the west-wind's lute.
For him may radiant mornings break
From out the bosom of the deep,
And golden noons above him bend,
And fortunate constellations keep
Bright vigils to his journey's end!

III

Take him, green Erin, to thy breast!
Keep him, gray London — for a while!
In him we send thee of our best,

Our wisest word, our blithest smile —
Our epigram, alert and pat,
That kills with joy the folly hit —
Our Yankee Tsar, our Autocrat
Of all the happy realms of wit!
Take him and keep him — but forbear
To keep him more than half a year....
His presence will be sunshine there,
His absence will be shadow here!

CRADLE SONG

I

Ere the moon begins to rise
Or a star to shine,
All the bluebells close their eyes —
So close thine,
Thine, dear, thine!

II

Birds are sleeping in the nest
On the swaying bough,
Thus, against the mother-breast —
So sleep thou,
Sleep, sleep, sleep!

BROKEN MUSIC

A note
All out of tune in this world's instrument.
AMY LEVY.

I KNOW not in what fashion she was made,
Nor what her voice was, when she used to speak,
Nor if the silken lashes threw a shade
On wan or rosy cheek.

I picture her with sorrowful vague eyes
Illumed with such strange gleams of inner light
As linger in the drift of London skies
Ere twilight turns to night.

I know not; I conjecture. 'T was a girl
That with her own most gentle desperate hand
From out God's mystic setting plucked life's pearl —
'T is hard to understand.

So precious life is! Even to the old
The hours are as a miser's coins, and she —
Within her hands lay youth's unminted gold
And all felicity.

The winged impetuous spirit, the white flame
That was her soul once, whither has it flown?
Above her brow gray lichens blot her name
Upon the carven stone.

This is her Book of Verses — wren-like notes,
Shy franknesses, blind gropings, haunting fears;

At times across the chords abruptly floats
A mist of passionate tears.

A fragile lyre too tensely keyed and strung,
A broken music, weirdly incomplete:
Here a proud mind, self-baffled and self-stung,
Lies coiled in dark defeat.

ART

"LET art be all in all," one time I said,
And straightway stirred the hypercritic gall:
I said not, "Let technique be all in all,"
But art — a wider meaning. Worthless, dead —
The shell without its pearl, the corpse of things —
Mere words are, till the spirit lend them wings.
The poet who wakes no soul within his lute
Falls short of art: 't were better he were mute.

The workmanship wherewith the gold is wrought
Adds yet a richness to the richest gold:
Who lacks the art to shape his thought, I hold,
Were little poorer if he lacked the thought.

The statue's slumber were unbroken still
In the dull marble, had the hand no skill.
Disparage not the magic touch that gives
The formless thought the grace whereby it lives!

"WHEN FROM THE TENSE CHORDS OF THAT MIGHTY LYRE"

JANUARY, 1892

I

WHEN from the tense chords of that mighty lyre
The Master's hand, relaxing, falls away,
And those rich strings are silent for all time,
Then shall Love pine, and Passion lack her fire,
And Faith seem voiceless. Man to man shall say,
"Dead is the last of England's Lords of Rhyme."

II

Yet — stay! there's one, a later laureled brow,
With purple blood of poets in his veins;

Him has the Muse claimed; him might Marlowe own;
Greek Sappho's son! — men's praises seek him now.
Happy the realm where one such voice remains!
His the dropt wreath and the unenvied throne.

III

The wreath the world gives, not the mimic wreath
That chance might make the gift of king or queen.
O finder of undreamed-of harmonies!
Since Shelley's lips were hushed by cruel death,
What lyric voice so sweet as this has been
Borne to us on the winds from over seas?

A SERENADE

Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep,
To her snowy chamber creep,
And straight whisper in her ear
What, awake, she will not hear —
Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep.

Tell her, so she may repent,
That no rose withholds its scent,
That no bird that has a song
Hoards the music summer-long —
Tell her, so she may repent.

Tell her there 's naught else to do,

If to-morrow's skies be blue,

But to come, with civil speech,

And walk with me to Chelsea Beach —

Tell her there 's naught else to do !

Tell her, so she may repent —

Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep !

A BRIDAL MEASURE

FOR S. F.

GIFTS they sent her manifold,
Diamonds and pearls and gold.
One there was among the throng
Had not Midas' touch at need:
He against a sylvan reed
Set his lips and breathed a song.

Bid bright Flora, as she comes,
Snatch a spray of orange blooms
For a maiden's hair.

Let the Hours their aprons fill
With mignonette and daffodil,
And all that 's fair.

For her bosom fetch the rose
That is rarest —
Not that either these or those
Could by any happening be
Ornaments to such as she ;
They 'll but show, when she is dressed,
She is fairer than the fairest
And out-betters what is best !

IMOGEN

LEONATUS POSTHUMUS *speaks:*

SORROW, make a verse for me
  That shall breathe all human grieving;
Let it be love's exequy,
  And the knell of all believing!
  Let it such sweet pathos have
  As a violet on a grave,
    Or a dove's moan when his mate
    Leaves the new nest desolate.
  Sorrow, Sorrow, by this token,
  Braid a wreath for Beauty's head. . . .

Valley-lilies, one or two,
Should be woven with the rue.
Sorrow, Sorrow, all is spoken —
She is dead!

SEVEN SONNETS

I

OUTWARD BOUND

I LEAVE behind me the elm-shadowed square
And carven portals of the silent street,
And wander on with listless, vagrant feet
Through seaward-leading alleys, till the air
Smells of the sea, and straightway then the care
Slips from my heart, and life once more is sweet.
At the lane's ending lie the white-winged fleet.
O restless Fancy, whither wouldst thou fare?
Here are brave pinions that shall take thee far —
Gaunt hulks of Norway; ships of red Ceylon;

Slim-masted lovers of the blue Azores!

'T is but an instant hence to Zanzibar,

Or to the regions of the Midnight Sun:

Ionian isles are thine, and all the fairy shores!

II

ELLEN TERRY IN "THE MERCHANT OF VENICE"

As there she lives and moves upon the scene,
So lived and moved this radiant womanhood
In Shakespeare's vision; in such wise she stood
Smiling upon Bassanio; such her mien
When pity dimmed her eyelids' golden sheen,
Hearing Antonio's story, and the blood
Paled on her cheek, and all her lightsome mood
Was gone. This shape in Shakespeare's thought has been!

Thus dreamt he of her in gray London town;
Such were her eyes; on such gold-colored hair
The grave young judge's velvet cap was set;
So stood she lovely in her crimson gown.
Mine were a happy cast, could I but snare
Her beauty in a sonnet's fragile net!

III

THE POETS

WHEN this young Land has reached its wrinkled
prime,
And we are gone and all our songs are done,
And naught is left unchanged beneath the sun,
What other singers shall the womb of Time
Bring forth to reap the sunny slopes of rhyme?
For surely till the thread of life be spun
The world shall not lack poets, though but one
Make lonely music like a vesper chime
Above the heedless turmoil of the street.
What new strange voices shall be given to these,

What richer accents of melodious breath ?
Yet shall they, baffled, lie at Nature's feet
Searching the volume of her mysteries,
And vainly question the fixed eyes of Death.

IV

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

FOREVER am I conscious, moving here,
That should I step a little space aside
I pass the boundary of some glorified
Invisible domain — it lies so near!
Yet nothing know we of that dim frontier
Which each must cross, whatever fate betide,
To reach the heavenly cities where abide
(Thus Sorrow whispers) those that were most
dear,
Now all transfigured in celestial light!
Shall we indeed behold them, thine and mine,

Whose going hence made black the noonday
sun? —
Strange is it that across the narrow night
They fling us not some token, or make sign
That all beyond is not Oblivion.

V

BOOKS AND SEASONS

BECAUSE the sky is blue; because blithe May
Masks in the wren's note and the lilac's hue;
Because — in fine, because the sky is blue
I will read none but piteous tales to-day.
Keep happy laughter till the skies be gray,
And the sad season cypress wears, and rue;
Then, when the wind is moaning in the flue,
And ways are dark, bid Chaucer make us gay.
But now a little sadness! All too sweet
This springtide riot, this most poignant air,

This sensuous sphere of color and perfume!
So listen, love, while I the woes repeat
Of Hamlet and Ophelia, and that pair
Whose bridal bed was builded in a tomb.

VI

REMINISCENCE

THOUGH I am native to this frozen zone
That half the twelvemonth torpid lies, or dead;
Though the cold azure arching overhead
And the Atlantic's never-ending moan
Are mine by heritage, I must have known
Life otherwhere in epochs long since fled;
For in my veins some Orient blood is red,
And through my thought are lotus blossoms blown.
I do remember . . . it was just at dusk,
Near a walled garden at the river's turn

(A thousand summers seem but yesterday!),
A Nubian girl, more sweet than Khoorja musk,
Came to the water-tank to fill her urn,
And, with the urn, she bore my heart away!

VII

ANDROMEDA

THE smooth-worn coin and threadbare classic
phrase
Of Grecian myths that did beguile my youth,
Beguile me not as in the olden days:
I think more grief and beauty dwell with truth.
Andromeda, in fetters by the sea,
Star-pale with anguish till young Perseus came,
Less moves me with her suffering than she,
The slim girl figure fettered to dark shame,
That nightly haunts the park, there, like a shade,
Trailing her wretchedness from street to street.

See where she passes — neither wife nor maid.
How all mere fiction crumbles at her feet!
Here is woe's self, and not the mask of woe:
A legend's shadow shall not move you so!

NOURMADEE

NOURMADEE

THE POET MIRTZY MOHAMMED-ALI TO HIS FRIEND ABOU-HASSEM IN ALGEZIRAS

O HASSEM, greeting! Peace be thine!
With thee and thine be all things well!
Give refuge to these words of mine.
The strange mischance which late befell
Thy servant must have reached thine ear;
Rumor has flung it far and wide,
With dark additions, as I hear.
When They-Say speaks, what ills betide!

So lend no credence, O my Friend,
To scandals, fattening as they fly.
Love signs and seals the roll I send:
Read thou the truth with lenient eye.

In Yússuf's garden at Tangier
This happened. In his cool kiosk
We sat partaking of his cheer —
Thou know'st that garden by the Mosque
Of Irma; stately palms are there,
And silver fish in marble tanks,
And scents of jasmine in the air —
We sat and feasted, with due thanks
To Allah, till the pipes were brought;
And no one spoke, for Pleasure laid
Her finger on the lips of Thought.
Then, on a sudden, came a maid,
With tambourine, to dance for us —
Allah il' Allah! it was she,

The slave-girl from the Bosphorus
That Yússuf purchased recently.

Long narrow eyes, as black as black!
And melting, like the stars in June;
Tresses of night drawn smoothly back
From eyebrows like the crescent moon.
She paused an instant with bowed head,
Then, at a motion of her wrist,
A veil of gossamer outspread
And wrapt her in a silver mist.
Her tunic was of Tiflis green
Shot through with many a starry speck;
The zone that claspt it might have been
A collar for a cygnet's neck.
None of the twenty charms she lacked
Demanded for perfection's grace;

Charm upon charm in her was packed
Like rose leaves in a costly vase.
Full in the lanterns' colored light
She seemed a thing of Paradise.
I knew not if I saw aright,
Or if my vision told me lies.
Those lanterns spread a cheating glare;
Such stains they threw from bough and vine
As if the slave-boys, here and there,
Had spilt a jar of brilliant wine.
And then the fountain's drowsy fall,
The burning aloes' heavy scent,
The night, the place, the hour — they all
Were full of subtle blandishment.

Much had I heard of Nourmadee —
The name of this fair slenderness —

Whom Yússuf kept with lock and key
Because her beauty wrought distress
In all men's hearts that gazed on it;
And much I marveled why, this night,
Yússuf should have the little wit
To lift her veil for our delight.
For though the other guests were old —
Grave, worthy merchants, three from Fez
(These mostly dealt in dyes and gold),
Cloth merchants two, from Mekïnez —
Though they were old and gray and dry,
Forgetful of their youth's desires,
My case was different, for I
Still knew the touch of springtime fires.
And straightway as I looked on her
I bit my lip, grew ill at ease,
And in my veins was that strange stir
Which clothes with bloom the almond-trees.

O Shape of blended fire and snow!
Each clime to her some spell had lent —
The North her cold, the South her glow,
Her languors all the Orient.
Her scarf was as the cloudy fleece
The moon draws round its loveliness,
That so its beauty may increase
The more in being seen the less.
And as she moved, and seemed to float —
So floats a swan! — in sweet unrest,
A string of sequins at her throat
Went clink and clink against her breast.
And what did some birth-fairy do
But set a mole, a golden dot,
Close to her lip — to pierce men through!
How could I look and love her not?

Yet heavy was my heart as stone,
For well I knew that love was vain ;
To love the thing one may not own ! —
I saw how all my peace was slain.
Coffers of ingots Yússuf had,
Houses on land, and ships at sea,
And I — alas ! was I gone mad,
To cast my eyes on Nourmadee !
I strove to thrust her from my mind,
I bent my brows, and turned away,
And wished that Fate had struck me blind
Ere I had come to know that day.
I fixed my thoughts on this and that ;
Assessed the worth of Yússuf's ring ;
Counted the colors in the mat —
And then a bird began to sing,
A bulbul hidden in a bough.

From time to time it loosed a strain
Of moonlit magic that, somehow,
Brought comfort to my troubled brain.

But when the girl once, creeping close,
Half stooped, and looked me in the face,
My reason fled, and I arose
And cried to Yússuf, from my place:
"O Yússuf, give to me this girl!
You are so rich and I so poor!
You would not miss one little pearl
Like that from out your countless store!"
"'This girl'? What girl? No girl is here!"
Cried Yússuf with his eyes agleam;
"Now, by the Prophet, it is clear
Our friend has had a pleasant dream!"
(And then it seems that I awoke,

And stared around, no little dazed
At finding naught of what I spoke:
The guests sat silent and amazed.)

Then Yússuf — of all mortal men
This Yússuf has a mocking tongue! —
Stood at my side, and spoke again:
"O Mirtzy, I too once was young.
With mandolin or dulcimer
I 've waited many a midnight through,
Content to catch one glimpse of Her,
And have my turban drenched with dew.
By Her I mean some slim Malay,
Some Andalusian with her fan
(For I have traveled in my day),
Or some swart beauty of Soudan.
No Barmecide was I to fare

On fancy's shadowy wine and meat;
No phantom moulded out of air
Had spells to lure me to her feet.
O Mirtzy, be it understood
I blame you not. Your sin is slight! —
You fled the world of flesh and blood,
And loved a vision of the night!
Sweeter than musk such visions be
As come to poets when they sleep!
You dreamed you saw fair Nourmadee?
Go to! it is a pearl I keep!"

By Allah, but his touch was true!
And I was humbled to the dust
That I in those grave merchants' view
Should seem a thing no man might trust.
For he of creeping things is least

Who, while he breaks of friendship's bread,
Betrays the giver of the feast.
"Good friends, I 'm not that man!" I said.
"O Yússuf, shut not Pardon's gate!
The words I spake I no wise meant.
Who holds the threads of Time and Fate
Sends dreams. I dreamt the dream he sent.
I am as one that from a trance
Awakes confused, and reasons ill;
The world of men invites his glance,
The world of shadows claims him still.
I see those lights among the leaves,
Yourselves I see, sedate and wise,
And yet some finer sense perceives
A presence that eludes the eyes.
Of what is gone there seems to stay
Some subtlety, to mock my pains:

So, when a rose is borne away,
The fragrance of the rose remains!"
Then Yússuf laughed, Abdallah leered,
And Melik coughed behind his hand,
And lean Ben-Auda stroked his beard
As who should say, "We understand!"
And though the fault was none of mine,
As I explained and made appear,
Since then I 've not been asked to dine
In Yússuf's garden at Tangier.

FAREWELL, O Hassem! Peace be thine!
With thee and thine be always Peace!
To virtue let thy steps incline,
And may thy shadow not decrease!
Get wealth — wealth makes the dullard's jest
Seem witty where true wit falls flat;
Do good, for goodness still is best —
But then the Koran tells thee that.
Know Patience here, and later Bliss;
Grow wise, trust woman, doubt not man;
And when thou dinest out — mark this —
Beware of wines from Ispahan!

FOOTNOTES

FIREFLIES

See where at intervals the firefly's spark
Glimmers, and melts into the fragrant dark;
Gilds a leaf's edge one happy instant, then
Leaves darkness all a mystery again!

PROBLEM

So closely knit are mind and brain,
Such web and woof are soul and clay,
How is it, being rent in twain,
One part shall live, and one decay?

ORIGINALITY

No bird has ever uttered note
That was not in some first bird's throat;
Since Eden's freshness and man's fall
No rose has been original.

KISMET

A GLANCE, a word — and joy or pain
Befalls; what was no more shall be.
How slight the links are in the chain
That binds us to our destiny!

A HINT FROM HERRICK

No slightest golden rhyme he wrote
That held not something men must quote ;
Thus by design or chance did he
Drop anchors to posterity.

PESSIMISTIC POETS

I LITTLE read those poets who have made
A noble art a pessimistic trade,
And trained their Pegasus to draw a hearse
Through endless avenues of drooping verse.

HOSPITALITY

WHEN friends are at your hearthside met,
Sweet courtesy has done its most
If you have made each guest forget
That he himself is not the host.

POINTS OF VIEW

BONNET in hand, obsequious and discreet,
The butcher that served Shakespeare with his meat
Doubtless esteemed him little, as a man
Who knew not how the market prices ran.

THE TWO MASKS

I GAVE my heart its freedom to be gay
Or grave at will, when life was in its May ;
So I have gone, a pilgrim through the years,
With more of laughter in my scrip than tears.

QUITS

IF my best wines mislike thy taste,
And my best service win thy frown,
Then tarry not, I bid thee haste ;
There 's many another Inn in town.

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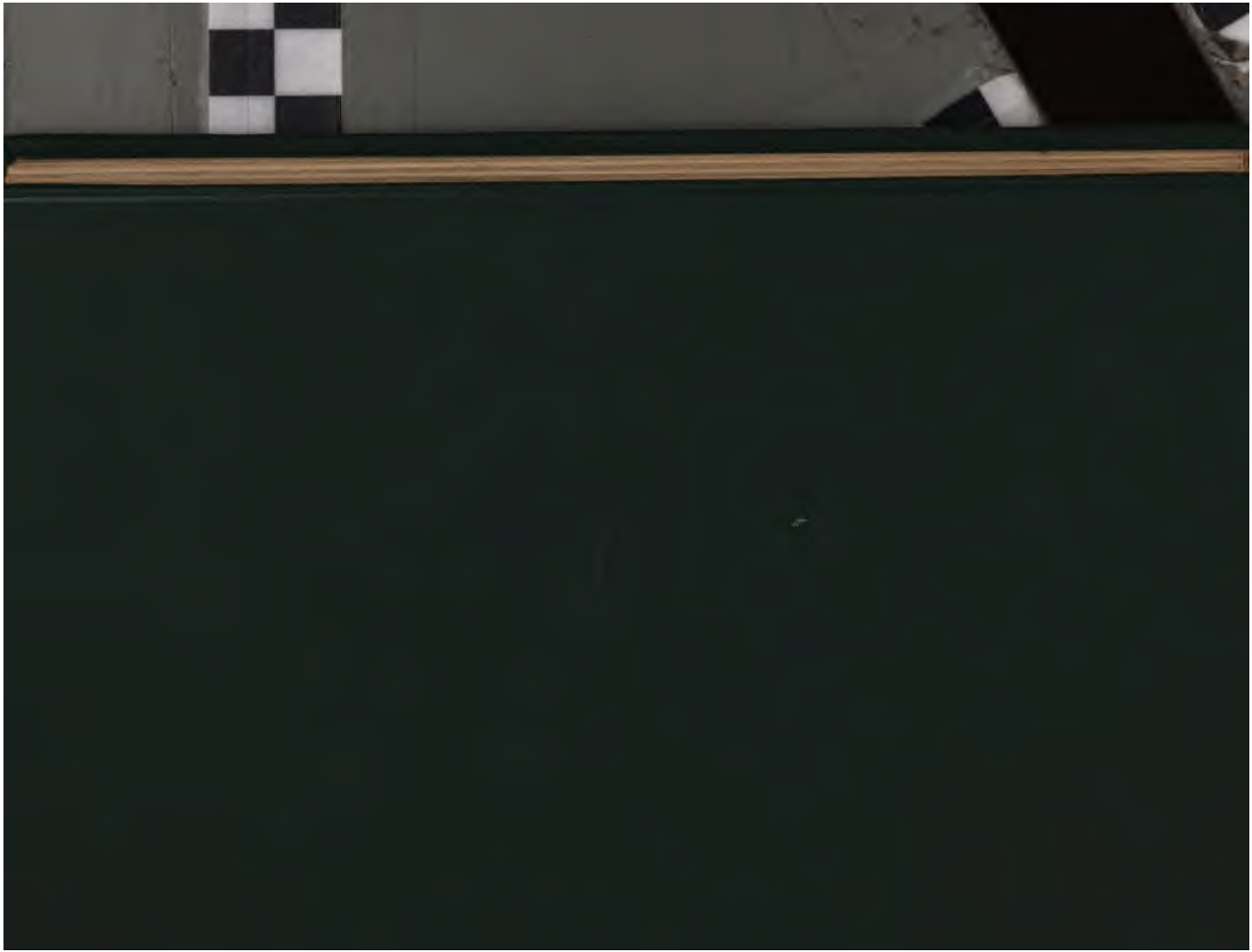
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